



# AmericasBarometer *Insights*: 2013

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## Prosperity and Protest in Brazil: The Wave of the Future for Latin America?

Vanderbilt University

**Executive Summary.** Results from the 2012 AmericasBarometer Survey indicate that the current protests in Brazil are truly unprecedented in the country's recent history. However, the 2012 data from Brazil also reveal certain trends in socioeconomic development and disenchantment with government performance that have created an environment ripe for the emergence of a new wave of protest participation. In general, rising education levels, increased use of social media, and widespread dissatisfaction with public services emerge as critical determinants of contentious politics, thus shedding light on the recent demonstrations in Brazil. More generally, these findings suggest that across Latin America, the past decade of strong economic growth, advances in education and increased access to social media may portend a new era of protests in countries such as Chile, Uruguay, and Peru that have enjoyed similar

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According to analysts, thirty five million  
Brazilians have

As predicted by the resource mobilization theory of protest, education, community activity,<sup>8</sup> and interest in politics have a powerful positive impact on the likelihood that one participates in a protest. Clearly protestors across the region are more educated and politically involved citizens, who probably have access to the organizational tools necessary for movement mobilization. Protestors also appear to be young, male, and emerge from the middle class. Insofar as recent socioeconomic trends have increased the number of people who belong to these groups, Brazil has become a country where mass protests are more likely.

One of the most interesting findings from this logistic regression is the importance of information sharing through social networks in mobilizing protest participation. In Brazil, where Internet usage has risen from roughly 3 percent of the population in 2000 to 45 percent in 2012,<sup>9</sup> this increased ability to share information regarding movement activities clearly plays an important role in explaining why the current demonstrations arose now as opposed to before.

Discontent like that expressed by protestors in Brazil also seems to have an important impact on the probability that one protests across the region. Specifically, satisfaction with public services like healthcare provision and the quality of schools the probability of protesting

## Conclusion

The recent protests in Brazil have been unprecedented due both to their sheer size and seemingly spontaneous nature. However, according to results from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey, Brazil displayed several harbingers of potential protest activity, including widespread dissatisfaction with public services and core democratic institutions, increasingly high levels of education and Internet usage, and decreasing levels of poverty. Though a substantial majority of Brazilians also perceived that the political system was corrupt, we find no direct effect of these perceptions on the probability of protest activity.

In many ways, the protests appear to be achieving their goals as we understand them from the AmericasBarometer data. Following the demonstrations against the bus fare hike in São Paulo, the local government reneged on the proposed rate increase. On June 24 President Dilma Rousseff announced an additional 23 billion dollars would be dedicated to public transportation, and renewed the government's commitment to improving a variety of other public services. More surprisingly, she announced a five point proposal to reform the political system through constitutional amendment that included proposed changes to campaign finance law, the electoral system, replacement of senators, votes in Congress, and political party alliances.<sup>10</sup>

Should these protests be viewed in a positive or negative light? On one hand, they appear motivated by grievances related to poor public services and a lack of faith in key political institutions—areas where the Brazilian government obviously needs to improve. While most of the demonstrations have been peaceful, violent actions on the part of both the protestors and the government are also

concerning. However, the findings presented above also indicate that the current demonstrations might have been made possible by a more educated and politically active citizenry that is finally taking ownership other educIndeTitle

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## Appendix

Table 1. Determinants of Protesting in the Americas, 2012

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Female	.1390**	.02401
Shared Political Information	.3011**	.0216
Interest in Politics	.3580**	.02537
Age	.0783**	.02628
Middle Class	.0516**	.02026
Community Participation	.3167**	.0234
Years of education	.1389**	.0286
Perception of Corruption	.0332	.0254
Satisfaction with Roads	.0624**	.02591
Satisfaction with Public Health	.0864**	.0258
System Support	.1595**	.0267
External Efficacy	.0418	.0258
Internal Efficacy	.1502**	.0274
Mexico	.1275**	.03794
Guatemala	.02566	.03578
El Salvador	.1355**	.03728
Honduras	.01745	.03639
Nicaragua	.03326	.03256
Costa Rica	.0503	.03685
Panama	.1319**	.04537
Colombia	.00386	.03346
Ecuador	.03364	.03568
Bolivia	.21024**	.04783
Peru	.10680**	.03217
Paraguay	.10808**	.0336
Chile	.09379**	.03853
Brazil	.114 **	.03497
Venezuela	.17263**	.03833
Argentina	.03544	.03461
Dominican Republic	.05433	.03370
Haiti	.15017**	.03519
Jamaica	.2386 **	.04570
Guyana	.05150	.03589
Trinidad & Tobago	.05343	.03428
Belize	.04803	.03388
Suriname	.09950**	.03857
Constant	2.732	.0322
F	43.75	
Number of Observations	31,556	

Note: Coefficients are statistically significant at \*\* p<0.05. Country of Reference: Uruguay